

Nadler's Historic Measure on Former Soviet Union Pensions is Approved in the House

Wednesday, 10 June 2009

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved Congressman Jerrold Nadler's (D-NY) amendment calling on the United States to work with the nations of the former Soviet Union (FSU) in order to facilitate payment of pensions to FSU émigrés now living in the U.S. Nadler's measure amends H.R. 2410, the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, and would direct the U.S. government to continue work to resolve the issue of unpaid FSU pensions. There are likely tens of thousands of FSU immigrants in this country who have yet to receive pensions after decades of labor for Soviet and post-Soviet industries.

"This resolution solidifies Congress's intention to help Russian-speaking émigrés in their struggle to receive their hard-earned pensions," said Nadler. "The FSU nations owe these people for their hard work, regardless of the politics, bureaucracy, or the discriminatory immigration policies of Soviet past. After these workers gave so much of their lives to their work in the FSU, they now deserve the pensions that were promised to them. I want to thank Yakov Goodman and Eliazar Bloshteyn for all of their hard and passionate work on this issue, and for first bringing it to my attention."

In 2006, at the request of community advocates from the FSU émigré community in Brooklyn, Nadler began his efforts to restore pension payments to those immigrants, working with key State Department and Social Security Administration officials on the issue. Thus far, almost none of the 15 former Soviet republics reliably pay pensions to retired workers living in the U.S.

The following is Nadler's statement on the House Floor, as written, in support of this resolution:

"Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of my amendment, which expresses the sense of Congress that we should continue working with the states of the former Soviet Union to see that immigrants from these states now living in America are paid their government pensions.

"The United States already has bilateral agreements or arrangements with dozens of other nations which address cross-country government pension coverage. While different agreements can structure and coordinate such pension coverage in different ways, the important point is that, under certain circumstances, government pensions are treated with reciprocity. In other words, with respect to countries with which we have arrangements, these countries pay our citizens who have earned their government pensions but no longer live in that country and we pay their citizens who have earned social security but no longer live in the U.S.

"Among the countries with which we do not have such arrangements are most of the states of the former Soviet Union. That is critically important because millions had no choice but to flee oppression in the Soviet Union in the 1970s, '80s and '90s. Many of these émigrés were Jews who were forced to renounce their citizenship – and the rights of citizenship – in order to leave. Now, hundreds of thousands of these émigrés live in America – many in my congressional district in New York. I am proud to represent these courageous immigrants and their families.

"The tragedy for these immigrants is that we do not have arrangements with their former home countries regarding government pensions and almost none of the former Soviet republics today is willing to facilitate the payment of those government pensions. This means that tens of thousands of elderly retirees, who gave decades of their lives working in state-run industries and who paid into the Soviet pension fund, are being denied what they have earned. These retirees are being denied the government pensions that their blood, sweat and tears, not to mention their rubles, were supposed to earn them. This is manifestly unjust. We must work with the states of the former Soviet Union to develop bilateral

government pension agreements – just like we have with dozens of other countries – to see that those pensions are paid.

“I already have begun working to make this happen. In the last three years, I have met with officials from the Department of State and the Social Security Administration. They supported my goal of reaching agreements with these states whereby government pensions would be paid. In particular, State Department and Social Security Administration officials have had preliminary discussions and meetings with their counterparts in Russia, Ukraine, and other states of the former Soviet Union. For various reasons, including a lack of funds, impossible bureaucracy, and complexities due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, these countries have declined to make good on their government pension promises.

“My amendment to address this issue is very straightforward. It would declare that it is the sense of Congress that the United States government should continue its work to solve this problem. We need to continue talking with Russia and Ukraine, as well as to reach out to other states of the former Soviet Union, to come to mutually acceptable solutions.

“Millions were forced to flee their homes in the former Soviet Union. They left their lives, their families, and their homeland. Now they are senior citizens, for the most part, in retirement. They should not be victimized again by being denied the government pensions that they earned. I ask that Members support my amendment, and encourage our government to work to solve this manifest unfairness.

“I reserve the balance of my time.”